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## **A Ray of Sunshine over the Rheem Shopping Center**

*By Sophie Braccini*

For months now all we could report about the Rheem Shopping Center was discouraging news of store closures. But in late June Town Manager Mike Segrest announced that two businesses owners had applied to set up shop in the Center, noting that the process would be streamlined and fees kept to a minimum.

The two businesses that have filed applications are a restaurant and a produce store. "We are waiving the Planning Processing fee, according to the Council's decision to do so for businesses that are taking over vacant spaces," said Segrest, "We are very encouraged by this move. It is a sign of economic revival." Planning Director Lori Salamack is doing her part by speeding up the permit process. "It is a balancing act," says Salamack, "we want the town to be as business-friendly as possible, and at the same time maintain the standard we have for businesses in town."

The new process means that the Planning Commission will not necessarily debate all new business applications. "Our municipal code allows us to process the applications administratively," explained Salamack, "but if a member of the Commission wants to see one, we will bring it to them at their next meeting." Residents living near the new businesses have been informed and can ask for a more formal review. The public can go to the Planning Department and make comments. The administrative approval will occur on July 6, if no one challenges the process.

The stakeholders appreciate the Town's willingness to show a business friendly face, from Dave Schnayer, the real estate broker who worked with the two business owners, to Michael Erez, the Moraga resident who plans to open the restaurant. His new place will be located in the space formerly occupied by Fudge Alley. Erez says he would like to open in the fall and plans to offer breakfast, lunch and dinner. "We will open a Mediterranean restaurant that will offer great food, entertainment and a sports bar; a place for adults and teens like nowhere else in Moraga," promises the business owner.

The second business will be located on the other side of the center, two shops north of CVS, before the Moraga Art Gallery. It will be a produce store that will also offer specialty foods, candies, grains and breads. "We appreciate the effort the Town is making to support businesses that want to locate here," said Chamber of Commerce president Edy Schwartz, "These new arrivals, coupled with the revival of the Rheem Theater, are excellent news for Moraga."

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